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Panel Opposes Americanizing Salvadoran War

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The Pentagon should resist escalating and Americanizing El Salvador's civil war, instead maintaining a low U.S. profile while training and supplying the Salvadoran army, says a panel of counterinsurgency experts.

Sources familiar with a classified report submitted last week by the eight-member advisory group, headed by retired Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub, said it warned against sending sophisticated military hardware, aerial bombs, napalm or American combat troops.

The sources, who insisted on anonymity, said the group criticized a recent U.S. trend toward providing more sophisticated conventional weapons to the Salvadoran army, arguing that simpler equipment is more suitable for an "unconventional" war in a poor country.

"There's always an underlying tendency to Americanize the conflict," said Sam Sarkesian, a political science professor at Loyola University in Chicago and a panel member. "All of us felt that the Duarte government is quite capable of doing what's necessary with our help if given enough time."

Pentagon officials declined to release the report or discuss its contents, but confirmed they had talked with Singlaub and others recently about U.S. military aid to Central America.

"The suggestions made by these individuals are being considered," said Col. Richard Lake, a Pentagon spokesman.

Singlaub, the panel's chairman, retired from the Army in 1978 after twice angering Jimmy Carter, then president, with public criticism of his military policies. Singlaub, in Paris for a reunion of veterans of the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of today's CIA, could not be reached for comment. A telephone call to his hotel in Paris was not returned.